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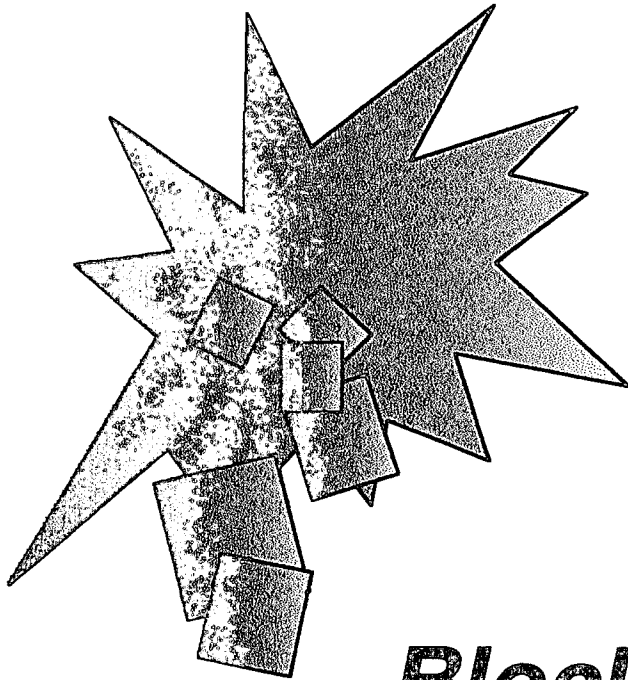
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## ABSTRACT

As of 1996, Chaparral High School in Las Vegas, Nevada, was in the fourth year of a radical restructuring effort. The school changed from a 6-period day, composed of 51-minute periods, to an alternating day schedule, composed of 3 102-minute periods per day. This report describes how the school developed and implemented the new schedule. Faculty and administrators followed the six-step change process recommended by Dr. Willard Daggett, of the Instructional Center for Leadership in Education. The stages include: create an awareness; base outcomes on adult roles and skills needed to compete in the job market; identify the necessary skills, knowledge, and behaviors needed for success; identify the negotiables and nonnegotiables; develop a plan; and implement the reforms. The school also added meaningful school-to-work courses, staff development, and multiple methods of assessment. In a survey administered to students, staff, and parents after the first year of the new schedule, 56 percent of the students rated their experience in the new program as "going great," while almost 70 percent of the faculty rated their level of support for the new program at 90 percent. Other outcomes attributed to the new program include a calmer campus atmosphere, more positive teacher-student relationships, a slight increase in some standardized test scores, and a constant attendance rate. Five figures are included. (LMI)

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# ***Block Schedule: Breaking the Barriers***

**Chaparral High School  
Las Vegas, Nevada**

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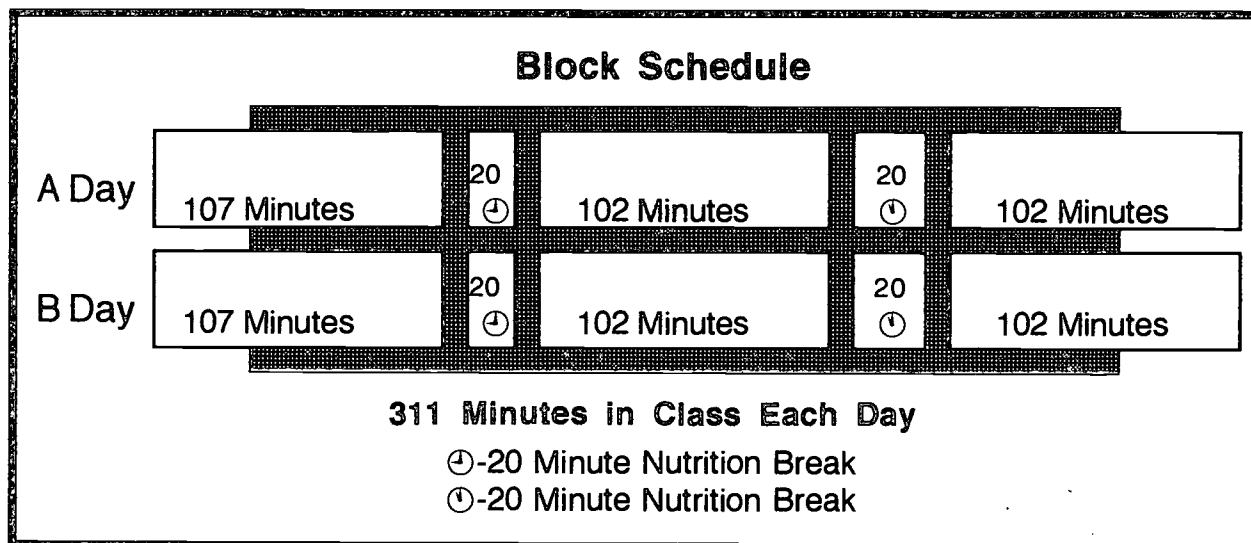
*M. West*

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# Using the Block Schedule as the Cornerstone of Change

## INTRODUCTION:

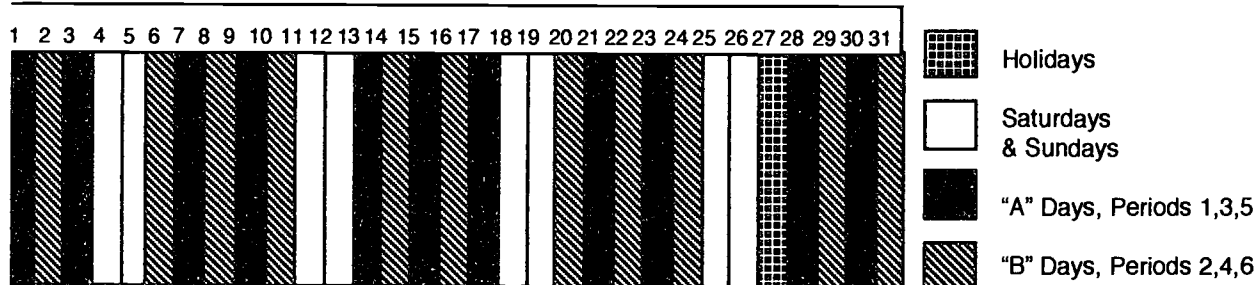
Chaparral High School in Las Vegas, Nevada is currently in the fourth year of an aggressive total restructuring effort. The vehicle of the change focus has been to break from a six-period day (51 minutes per period) to an alternating A-B day (102 minutes per period) in which students have three classes per day. Students still receive the same number of instructional minutes as they did in the traditional 180 day class meeting since the classes meet twice as long every other day for 90 class periods a year.



## Sample Month

May 1996

from Year-at-a-Glance Chaparral Calendar



### REGULAR BELL SCHEDULE

"A" DAY	"B" DAY	
Early Bird	Early Bird	6:15 - 7:15
Period 1	Period 2	7:20 - 9:07
Period 3	Period 4	9:17 - 10:59
LUNCH	LUNCH	10:59 - 11:44
Period 5	Period 6	11:49 - 1:31

### ASSEMBLY BELL SCHEDULE

"A" DAY	"B" DAY	
Early Bird	Early Bird	6:25 - 7:15
Period 1	Period 2	7:20 - 8:47
Period 3	Period 4	8:57 - 10:19
LUNCH	LUNCH	10:19 - 11:04
Period 5	Period 6	11:09 - 12:31
ASSEMBLY	ASSEMBLY	12:36 - 1:31

At Chaparral, the block has been used as a vehicle to enable a significant change in instructional techniques, and implementation of relevant School-To-Work programs while not sacrificing the highly successful college preparatory curriculum that has produced National Merit Finalists on a yearly basis and more recently a Rhodes Scholar.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON CHAPARRAL HIGH SCHOOL:**

Built in 1973, Chaparral High School currently has an enrollment of 2600 students in grades 9-12. The attendance zone the school serves was originally a middle class to upper middle class area with a small percentage of minority students bused in from West Las Vegas. Today the attendance zone is largely a middle to lower middle class economic area. Over the last few years, the minority population has increased yearly at a 3% rate to a current high of 37%. Presently, 38% of Chaparral's graduating seniors pursue a post-secondary education.

This change in demographics roughly mirrors that of the Clark County School District's in which Chaparral is located. The district's phenomenal growth has led to its current K-12 enrollment of 180,000 students. This places the district as the nation's tenth largest.

#### **TESTING DATA:**

Currently 99% of Chaparral's students pass the state mandated competency tests in math, reading and writing. The average ACT score of 22.1 places Chaparral above the district and national averages. The school's performance on the CTBS tests shows an overall ability level at the 46th percentile with an overall achievement at the 52nd percentile.

#### **IDENTIFIED NEED FOR CHANGE:**

Regardless of the school's strong academic history, it became obvious that the standard high school curriculum and traditional instructional strategies were not meeting the needs of all of Chaparral's students. In fact, if Chaparral students were to be given the best education possible the following five items needed to be addressed immediately:

1. Meaningful School-To-Work programs must be initiated.
2. Current educational research concerning learning styles and multiple intelligence theories must be included in daily classroom instruction in all classes.
3. An organized plan of staff development aimed at educating and retraining Chaparral's staff must be implemented.
4. Strategies must be developed to lengthen the amount of daily classroom instruction time for students.
5. Community resources (i.e. mentoring, job shadowing, technical skills training) must be accessed for successful implementation of School-To-Work programs.

## THE CHANGE PROCESS:

A great deal of time and effort was put into researching the advantages and disadvantages of changing to a block schedule. Representatives from Chaparral visited other schools in Nevada and Utah that were using a block schedule. Current professional publications, the Internet, and phone calls to forty schools in all parts of the country using block scheduling were also enlisted as resources in collecting data.

Virtually all of the information collected indicated that block scheduling had the ability to foster significant changes in instructional strategies. Reports obtained also indicated that there was no decrease in student achievement, while attendance rates normally improved. All of the schools surveyed believed the overall atmosphere of their campus was calmer and less stressful as a result of block scheduling.

The common challenge for a significant number of schools was the teaching adjustments faced by their math, foreign language and music departments. All of these schools stated that they were making steady progress in this area through staff development activities and by ascribing to the "less is more" theory.

The six-step process for change recommended by Dr. Willard Daggett, from the International Center for Leadership in Education, served as the outline for Chaparral's transformation. The overall plan was to include all elements of the school and community in a highly democratic and open process. The overall plan and accompanying strategies used at Chaparral are outlined in the next section.

After conducting an intense four-month period of research, meetings, and school visits, a secret ballot vote was conducted in which all teachers were asked to note "yes" or "no" on the proposal to switch to an A/B alternating block schedule for the upcoming school year. After much debate, it was agreed that a 60% endorsement would be required to carry the plan to go to block scheduling. When the ballots were tabulated by the school's student council in a general faculty meeting, 65% of the faculty endorsed the change.

After two and one-half years of operating on the block schedule, over 90% of the staff now endorse it as a superior instructional vehicle when compared to the traditional six-period day. The "block" has proven to be a more productive use of instructional time, while also being more flexible and "application friendly" in terms of course content.

Since the vote to go to "block", staff transfers and retirements have given teachers opposing the change the chance to move on to other schools or opportunities. Conversely, there has been a significant positive change in the attitude of those teachers who initially voted against changing to a block schedule. After teaching on the block schedule for a few weeks, several of the "oppositionists" indicated to the administration that they would never want to return to the previous six-period day.

## **DR. DAGGETT'S RECOMMENDED PROCESS FOR CHANGE:**

### **1. CREATE AN AWARENESS:**

In August, 1993, a concerted effort was begun at Chaparral to inform staff, students, and parents of the rapidly changing job market opportunities and accompanying employment qualifications facing students graduating from high school. The issue of character education as everyone's responsibility was also introduced at this time.

### **2. FOCUS ON ADULT ROLES:**

The focus on the outcomes at Chaparral has moved from courses, grades, and test scores to the adult roles and skills graduates need to be competitive in the rapidly changing job market. This has been accomplished by educating staff, students, and parents on the career opportunities and salaries available.

### **3. IDENTIFY THE NECESSARY SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE, AND BEHAVIORS:**

Through the process of bringing representatives from the various areas of the job market into Chaparral on a regular basis, the entire school community is now aware of the skills, knowledge, and behaviors required for success. The goal has been to close the gap between what is taught in school as compared to what is required in the world of work. The phrase "When will I use what you are teaching me today?" has become a hallmark of all classroom instruction.

### **4. IDENTIFY THE NEGOTIABLES AND NON-NEGOTIABLES:**

Just like other schools attempting to restructure, the Chaparral school community had to examine what items were negotiable in the change process. The major issue to surface was that of daily preparation time for teachers. This area is still a concern for a small percentage of teachers at Chaparral, but the majority of staff have reached a compromise on the issue, and many appreciate the "longer prep time at one stretch" advantage available via the block schedule.

### **5. DEVELOP A PLAN:**

During the entire process of restructuring, Chaparral has committed to a long range plan of staff development and networking in the business community. These efforts have resulted in a three year commitment to the school objectives of:

- Conducting a variety of instructional activities in class in conjunction with relevant, authentic assessment techniques.
- Emphasizing the skills identified in the SCANS report as a method to focus



- on a legitimate School-To-Work curriculum and course offerings.
- Implementing an interdisciplinary approach to instruction.
- Incorporating technology throughout all areas of the curriculum.

## 6. IMPLEMENT REFORMS:

The reforms at Chaparral have centered around:

- Staff development to address the changes in instructional and assessment techniques found to be productive in a block schedule.
- Educating the entire school community in regard to the changing job market and how that relates to the necessary current job skills and technical training.
- Implementing curriculum changes aimed at giving students school-to-work job skills thus giving their high school education true value in the marketplace.
- Using the interdisciplinary approach in instruction to show the connections that exist in all subject matter.
- Striving for application of knowledge while stressing the "less is more" approach in examining the massive amount of content inherent in most courses.

## CURRICULAR CHANGES:

The focus of the change in the curriculum has been to maintain the excellent college preparatory program at Chaparral while adding meaningful School-To-Work (STW) courses. The additions in the STW area focus on pre-apprenticeship programs, internships, mentoring, mock job interviews, conferencing skills, school-based enterprise and job shadowing opportunities for students and staff alike.

## Courses that have been added to the student menu include:

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YES, Inc.	•English, business, computer class is combined in a two-block period simulating a company atmosphere
Real Estate	•real estate instruction is by industry employees
Electronic Publications	•computer projects are designed for school products
Technical Writing	•business/industry writing is taught in a computer lab
Governmental Internships	•community offices accept student placement
Theatre Pre-apprenticeships	•partnership is with a local hotel showroom theatre
Painting Class	•local painters' union assists with instruction
Broadcasting Internship	•KLVX provides on the job training for students
Television Production	•inhouse studio serves campus' broadcasting needs

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All of these courses provide students with a rigorous and relevant curriculum aimed at giving students current job market skills. In addition, they have given "added value" to the high school diploma for these students.

Students who complete Technical Preparation courses receive a Certificate of Training with a workplace skills assessment included. Several Chaparral courses have been articulated for college credit at Community College of Southern Nevada. The first Conference for High School Women was held during the '95-'96 school year at Chaparral to acquaint students with a wide variety of career options for women.

An integral part of these courses and conferences has been the community involvement in each. On a regular basis, employees from the various corresponding areas come to school to address classes and bring application of the course curriculum into the classroom for the students to use.

Support for these programs has rapidly grown as word of Chaparral's emphasis on STW has spread throughout the community. Plans are currently underway to add several new courses and technologies which will continue to develop other STW opportunities for students.

## **CHANGE IN INSTRUCTIONAL METHODOLOGIES:**

As mentioned earlier, one of the primary reasons to adopt a block schedule was to improve the instructional methodologies being used in class. As in the case in most classrooms in American high schools, the primary instructional tool has been the lecture-based approach to teaching. Given the research of Dr. Howard Gardner on multiple intelligences and Dr. William Glasser on learning styles, a change from the lecture-based method of teaching was necessary.

The major dilemma facing the Chaparral faculty was an overwhelming acceptance of the current research but an equal frustration at not knowing how to apply the findings. Consequently, an ongoing concerted education, retraining and inservice of staff was implemented. Through the two staff development days allowed by the district as well as assembly day schedules (school released one-hour early) once a month, time was allocated to staff to address the key issues for training that they selected. Nationally known consultants such as: Dr. Daggett, Dr. Ray Golarz, Dr. James Knight, Dr. Roger Taylor, community resource persons, and university experts were and are currently utilized for training updates.

This process is currently in its third year and is reaping tremendous gains, but it is by no means complete. In fact, the process will likely never be completed given the research that continues to come forth in the metacognitive field of psychology. Emphasis is on creating life-long learners of the faculty as well as the students.

The shift of instructional strategies from primarily the lecture approach is to now use the long block of time in class to utilize group activities, problem solve, create projects, and apply knowledge while incorporating technology. Dr. Roger Taylor summarizes this strategy as dividing class time into 1/3 content, 1/3 process, and 1/3 product for a balanced educational assimilation.

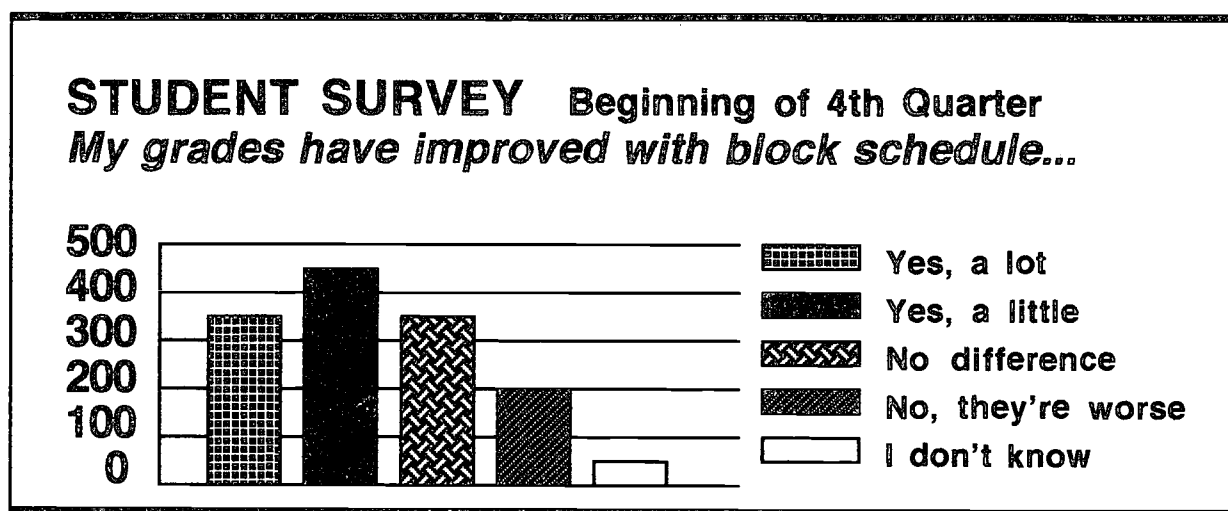


## ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS:

It follows logically that if the method of instruction has changed, then students must also be assessed in a different manner. Consequently, students are now asked to solve complex problems, create portfolios, complete group and individual projects, perform skits, plays, or vignettes, while also being expected to recall knowledge on standard tests and essays.

The STW programs require assessments that more closely resemble employee evaluations of character and interpersonal communication abilities in addition to levels of identified specific skill development. A participation grade requirement is written into the school handbook.

Students were surveyed at the beginning of their 4th quarter on block scheduling to report how their grades have been affected by the change.



## IMPLICATIONS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS

The IEPs are written based on the individual student's diagnosed learning disability. Therefore, providing a wide variety of instructional methods and accompanying assessment tools is a natural fit. In the past, IEP's have included vocational goals. The emphasis on a School-To-Work curriculum makes meeting the IEP goals much easier in the regular education classroom. Many special education students have become actively involved in job shadowing activities which provide guidance to post-school work possibilities for them.

The curriculum reforms that have taken place at Chaparral are ideal for many learning disabled students. The increased emphasis on School-To-Work classes and the accompanying job skills development give a "value added" emphasis to a high

school diploma. In addition, the application based nature of the instruction in these classes is a much more effective way to teach students with or without learning disabilities.

Another benefit of the change in instructional techniques is that special education students are now more successful in their mainstreamed regular education classes. Block scheduling allows more time for students to verify their understanding of homework assignments while the teacher is still available for clarification. If homework begins in class the student can get immediate feedback and make corrections where necessary.

As a result of the staff development opportunities, more faculty members are broadening their teaching methods to include multiple intelligence and learning styles theories into daily instruction. This creates an environment in which the special education student is much more likely to succeed.

Transitional planning is developed in the IEP process to prepare students for life after graduation. Vocational goals are established to enable students to become prepared and competitive for employment in the world of work. The emphasis on a school-to-work curriculum at Chaparral also simplifies meeting the EIP goals in the regular classroom. Many students have become actively involved in job shadowing activities which provide guidance to post-school work possibilities. The Y.E.S. Program, Painters Apprenticeship, Auto Detailing and pre-vocational classes also allow the special education student the exposure to the world of work. Involving a more hands-on curriculum to education has truly affected students of special needs in an academically positive fashion.

Since students are now more successful in class, the number of classroom discipline referrals has decreased. And, since students are more successful, the number of students being accepted to vocational magnet schools and job apprenticeships has also increased.

In summation, the success rate for all students, including special education students, has improved as a direct result of the changes fostered in the block schedule currently in place at Chaparral High School.

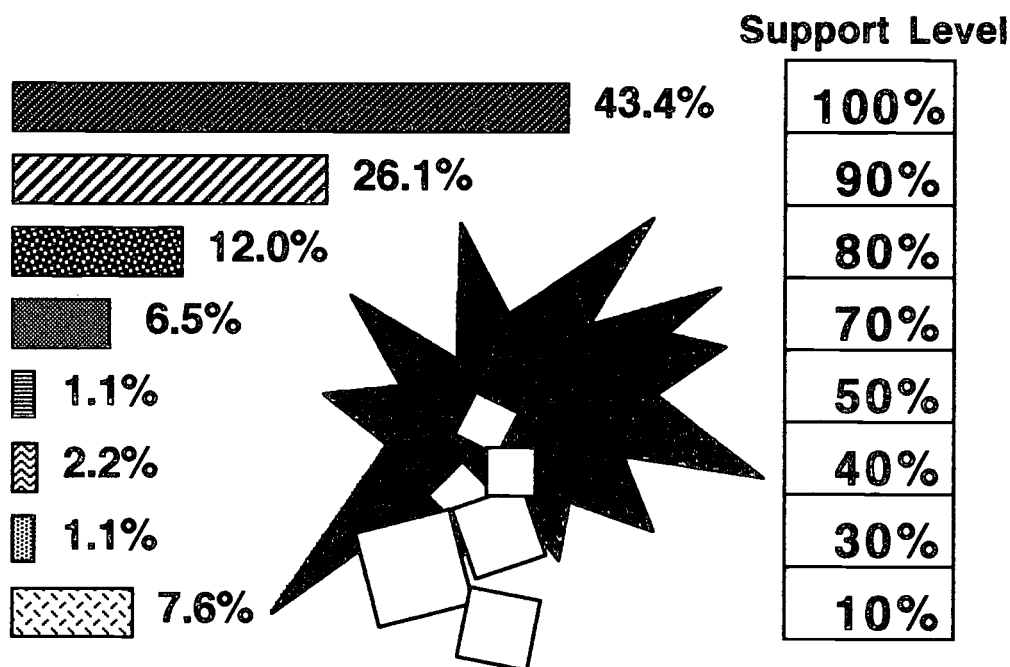
## **FEEDBACK FROM STUDENTS, STAFF, AND PARENTS:**

Prior to the decision to implement a block schedule, representatives from all facets of the school community were given multiple opportunities to raise questions and voice concerns. The major curricular areas in question were music, foreign language, and mathematics. Some representatives from those departments felt that the lack of daily instructional contact with students would somehow diminish student's recall of information and decrease the instructional effectiveness of teachers.

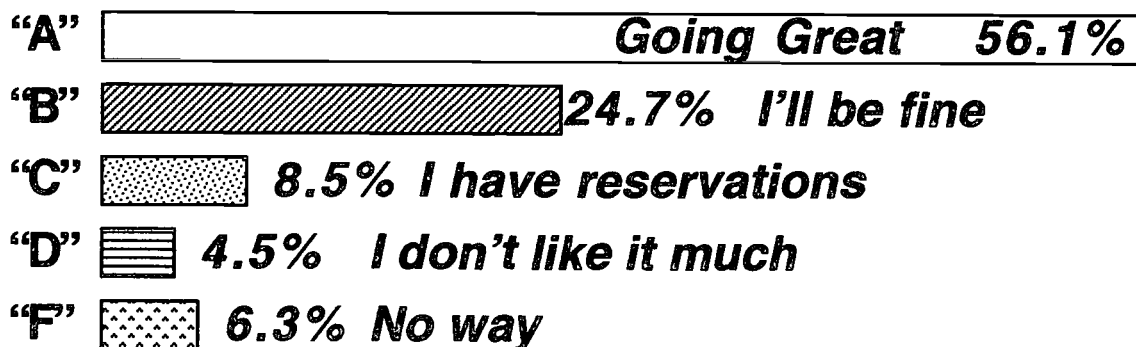
To date, the foreign language and music teachers are in unanimous support of the change in schedule, while the math department continues to adjust the methodologies to make the concept viable. In short, the math department endorses the schedule and is now doing its best to make it work for all students.

During the fourth quarter of the 1994-95 school year, Chaparral's first year on block scheduling, a survey was disseminated to students, staff, and parents. The graphs that follow indicate highlights from that survey.

### FACULTY/STAFF RESPONSE TO BLOCK SCHEDULING AFTER FIRST SEMESTER



### STUDENTS GRADE BLOCK SCHEDULING



## SUMMATION:

It is extremely important to note that virtually all of the positive outcomes hoped for by switching to a block schedule (i.e. calmer campus atmosphere, more positive teacher/pupil relationships, increased variety of teaching and assessment techniques, changes in establishing a relevant curriculum) have been achieved on a consistent basis. Standardized test scores (as measured by the CTBS test battery) have remained constant over previous years while ACT, SAT, and Advanced Placement scores have increased slightly. Attendance rates have remained constant while the number of students earning honor roll status has increased.

Chaparral High School has had a proven track record of academic excellence in preparing students for college. Given the rapidly changing demographics in the school district and the equally drastic need to prepare students for the world of work, a change to block scheduling was the only sensible choice to accommodate the necessary instructional adaptations.

The change has both energized and stressed the faculty as they continually attempt to improve their instructional and assessment techniques to mirror those endorsed by current research. Change is not easy. It is stressful and it truly never ends. The evolution process in public schools has been likened to changing the tire on a car while it is moving. At Chaparral High School, it has been all of that and more.

What has come to light throughout the change process at Chaparral High School is that change is messy; that when one part of the internal system is changed, it affects other parts in an exponential manner. Regardless of the stress and mess, the students of Chaparral are being educated in a more effective manner in all of their classes, while being offered a more rigorous and relevant curriculum. The block schedule is the vehicle that has made this possible.

The benefactors of the restructuring efforts at Chaparral have been the students, their families and the community at large. These significant gains are directly attributed to and shared by the school's administrative team, teachers, support staff, students, parents, and community.



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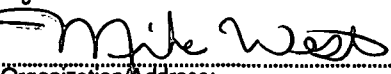
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